

Henry of Poděbrady, the son of king George of Poděbrady

Jan Věchet

Abstract

The main aim of this bachelor's dissertation is to gainsay the myths which surround the personality of Henry of Poděbrady, the youngest son of Hussite king George, who is in the Czech scholar tradition usually considered to be the black sheep of the family of Poděbrady. He is being presented by many high school teachers as a philanderer, drunkard and a chronic debtor who had feasted away all the inheritance from his father. But there is no evidence for such a negative depiction of Henry's character to be found in the historical sources. In this biography, we would like to describe Henry's life as precisely as we can with the little of what has been left from the reliable sources, and we would like to prove that the reality of his life was a lot more austere.

In the first part (before year 1471) we shall focus on Henry's childhood which had had a key impact on his future. The upbringing at the Prague's court had prepared him for the role of the king's younger sons and his only duty was to represent his family and become a part of his father's marriage policy.

The second part (after year 1471) describes Henry as an adult. His father king George died unexpectedly about a month after Henry's marriage and so under these circumstances, Henry had to strike out on his own and take care of his new family. On one hand he had to resist his brothers who were usurping his part on father's heritage, on the other hand the creditors who were demanding the repayment of the debts left by the late king George and the wars which he had led against the Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus. With regard to the huge indebtedness it can be said that the situation in whole would have been unmanageable even for a lot more skilled economist and it is no wonder that the crash had come very early and Henry had to gradually sell off his manors. When Henry rashly engaged himself to the Hlohov war in the 1480's, he became almost a landless man due to the strict peace conditions shortly before his death. His greatest weakness was that he had never been able to consider carefully the risks and to invest properly. He had been brought up within the best traditions of the Old World and he had never understood the new trends of the aristocratic entrepreneurship.

The third part is dedicated to Henry's attitude towards women. The tales of the inexhaustible amount of Henry's mistresses are familiar to us thanks to the enunciations of his personal enemies. Henry's good reputation has also been notably damaged by his own poem 'Májový sen' which has got a slightly erotic undertone. But in spite of the endeavour of a few generations of literary historians, we are not able to say even nowadays what place did this 'obscene' work occupy in his life. Did he write it just for himself, for the group of his very close friends or did he mean to make this 'shocking' poem public? In the case that it would have been meant purely for Henry's personal pleasure and it would have been found in his inheritance, he should not be accused of unmoral and lascivious behaviour. If there is no evidence, it is not possible to condemn him so strictly. Of all Henry's alleged mistresses we

know only Kateřina of Strážnice and Šítary, who gave him a bastard son named Bedřich. Henry took care of his material provision in practically a kingly way and this shows his personality in a much better light.